

-pt 2 of 4

**NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY  
NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE**

**Policy Options:**

**Reducing the Human Carnage in  
Least Developed Nations  
By Reducing the Sales of Conventional Arms**

**Core Course IV Essay**

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### The Issue:

In the post Cold War environment we face a dramatic array of often competing issues and agendas which cry for attention and demand a share of our constrained resources. One of the most agonizing situations which we view daily is the tragic human devastation taking place in countries where order has broken down and where armies, militias and even armed teenagers torment innocent civilian populations. Americans are barraged with the horrors in Somalia and Yugoslavia, but comparable carnage exists in numerous other nations; Liberia, Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Sudan, are some of the most notorious; but others exist today and many others are on the verge of comparable disintegration.

What is common to these situations is that nations or governments have disintegrated. In traditional warfare (even civil war) military force is pitted against military force; sovereign nations or political organizations fight over territory, resources, rights of access, influence, etc. In these new conflicts, portions (sometimes all) of the civilian population are the target of the aggression or the object over which battles are fought. In some circumstances, the possessions of the civilian population are targeted; in others cases their very existence due to race, religion, clan, tribe or ethnic heritage renders them a target. In each case, the duties of the nation have been abrogated, and the tools normally reserved for security forces have been turned on the population.

Our public agonizes with a sense of helplessness over such situations and we hear discussions of "compassion fatigue". The number of such conflicts (30 in the world, nearly half in Africa

(Rotberg, 193)) and the size of the populations affected exceeds the best efforts of the International Community. This situation begs for new directions which will offer long term solutions for preventing the chaos, or minimizing the destruction to civilian populations if future states devolve and break apart.

### Weapons, Weapons Everywhere:

**Which Weapons?** - Proliferation of weapons is clearly a vital issue to our nation's security and to the well-being of mankind. Unfortunately, the weapons contributing to the devastation in the least developed nations are well below the threshold of most proliferation efforts. As nations develop and attempt to define their security requirements, weapons acquisition is based on available resources, potential sources for weapons, and assessments of the regional security situation (Payne, 2). Many developing nations are still affected by a colonial legacy and security requirements are often a complex array of ties to the colonial parent; claims to legitimacy by the existing ruler, party or government; and geopolitical alignments inherited from the Cold War (Mullins, 3-11). The most basic security forces are normally infantry forces that can contribute to territorial defense; palace guard; and police, customs and border security. Unfortunately, it is the weapons of infantry that are most destructive to civilian populations if they are turned away from defense and security missions (Mullins, 11). These weapons include assault rifles (e.g. AK-47, UZI, M-16), anti-armor weapons (e.g. RPG-7), landmines, mortars, and crew-served weapons (e.g. machine guns, grenade launchers, recoilless rifles, anti-aircraft

artillery, anti-aircraft missiles, etc).

**From Where?** - Adding to the difficulty of controlling infantry weapons is the numbers of weapons present in the world and the array of potential sources that exist. The Cold War resulted in an enormous overarming of the two competing blocks; tremendous productive capacity was built in the full array of weaponry, from ICBMs to rifles. Particularly under the planned economies of the Warsaw Pact, arms plants had production runs of years, often completely unrelated to real requirements. The Soviet Union produced in excess of 20 million AK-47 assault rifles; it also transferred the production capability to several of its clients and allies (to include China, North Korea, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia) and has since gone on to produce two new generations of more modern or efficient assault rifles (Hogg).

In addition, the number and variety of current producers of infantry weapons is daunting; in addition to the US and Russia, major producers include China, North Korea, Italy, France, Switzerland, Sweden, Germany, Egypt, Israel, South Africa, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia (where nearly all capability has been consolidated to within Serbia). Nations have developed weapons production capabilities for various reasons. Some, such as Egypt, China and Yugoslavia, have focused on guaranteeing a military capability that would reduce superpower leverage. Other states such as North Korea, South Africa and Israel are isolated and have developed capability based on a perceived struggle for national survival. Once military production capability exists, there is often a significant impetus for foreign sales, in order to keep production running longer than domestic requirements would afford (maintain employment), to earn

foreign exchange, and to defray development costs (Adams 271-272). Finally, it should be noted that several of the states in this business clearly have few scruples as to assessing the propriety of individual sales or the validity of each customer's needs (to the point where they will even look the other way when arms are clearly being funneled to international terrorists).

**Obtained How?** - Weapons are obtained through various means. Especially in the least developed nations, foreign assistance is often an important source. Foreign assistance can be in the form of direct military assistance (grants or loans), offers of military surplus hardware, and through foreign aid funds. Nations can procure arms through legal sales on open (though not necessarily unregulated) trading markets. (The U.S. Department of Commerce regulates all foreign sales of military hardware by U.S. manufacturers.) And nations can pursue other acquisition strategies, such as extra-legal purchases on grey and black markets and via capture from other states by force of arms.

#### **Current Non-Proliferation Efforts:**

Proliferation activities are generally focused on limiting the destructive potential of traditional interstate conflicts. Generally, the level of attention and energy that proliferation issues receive is directly related to the destructiveness of the weapons systems being controlled; thus efforts at controlling nuclear weapons, chemical and biological weapons, and critical delivery systems, dominate the limited available policy attention, energy and time. Following the Gulf War, and with progress on Middle East peace talks, there was

momentum for significant controls on conventional weapons proliferation, particularly to Middle Eastern nations. This momentum has, however, largely been dissipated. With conventional arms, there are conflicting interests, priorities and pressures in moving toward restricting flows of conventional arms.

**Moral Arguments Favor Restricting Arms Flows:** Particularly in the developing world, resources allocated toward weapons procurement could, in most cases, be applied far more constructively. In many cases, arms procurement is seen as threatening by neighboring states; greater military capability is interpreted as implying hostile intent, although this generally applies more in the case of advanced conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction. Finally, limiting proliferation of weapons is seen as enhancing existing stability. Short of halting weapons sales, the U.N. Register of Conventional Arms, created in 1992 provides a mechanism for declaring weapons sales and transfers (of seven major types of armaments) between nations in order to maximize transparency, maintain stability and encourage confidence-building through openness and participation in this international vehicle (Laurance).

**Pragmatic Arguments Work Against Restricting Arms Flows:** One of the biggest forces against limiting arms sales is the size of the market, the economic importance of the sales to the U.S. economy and the political influence of major arms manufacturers. Various policy and strategic interests often work against keeping modern weapons from current or potential allies. Access to current technology is often offered as a reward or incentive, or as confirmation of the health of relations. Continuing sales are often an implied aspect of a security

relationship which includes training, maintenance, supply and technology upgrades. Finally, it is often in our security interest to have weapons commonality with allies as we review scenarios where we anticipate bilateral, multilateral and coalition operations.

### Discussion:

**It's Not Regular Proliferation!** - In contrast to most proliferation issues, attempting to limit the transfer and sale of infantry weapons to developing nations is less a regional security issue and should be seen more in the context of nationbuilding, democratization, and humanitarian interests. Controlling these weapons cannot compete with more traditional proliferation efforts for policy or diplomatic time, attention or energy. This assertion is based on several factors.

First, traditional proliferation efforts focus on the classes of weapons which are clearly of fundamental importance to peace and international stability. In contrast, direct threats to U.S. vital interests from infantry weapons are negligible. Secondly, the politics and the policy implications of "high" (high-technology and high lethality) proliferation issues (in economic and regional interstate terms) are markedly different from the dimensions of "low" (infantry) proliferation. Efforts at controlling "low" proliferation are generally less likely to run counter to the enormous political and economic forces that support foreign arms sales of major modern combat weapons systems. Similarly, interstate policy implications or regional balances of power are far less likely to be affected by nations gaining (or not acquiring) stocks of infantry weapons.



Finally, the array of potential suppliers and the numbers of weapons already present in arsenals make the dimensions of controlling "low" proliferation very different. In contrast to "high" proliferation efforts, with infantry weapons the cat is out of the bag; the challenge is managing the behavior of the states potentially acquiring the weapons and the conditions under which weapons are acquired.

**Is There a U.S. Role?** - With the existing array of potential weapons sources we must assess if U.S. behavior can make a difference. Sheer numbers suggest yes. In 1992 the U.S. provided nearly 60% of the weapons transferred to Third World nations (Grimmett 56). Similarly, six nations (the U.S., Russia, France, China, Great Britain, and Germany) supply at least 85% of the arms traded on world markets (Hartung, Sep '93, p 21). (In 1991, China's sales to the Third World were 1/40<sup>th</sup> of U.S. sales (Hartung, Spring '93, p 58).) While these proportions are for total arms sales (and clearly, high technology weapons make up a huge proportion of the total), the size of the U.S. share suggests that we can have very significant influence on the market. As the seller of note, we should be in a position to go beyond simply affecting the market forces and provide a moral component to infantry weapons sales.

The last time the U.S. pursued aims of significantly reducing worldwide arms transfers was in the early years of the Carter Administration. Despite Cold War differences, significant progress was achieved in negotiations with the Soviets in 1977 and 1978 on exports to Third World nations. These negotiations included work on specific language that would control weapons particularly destructive to civilian populations (Hartung, Spring 1993, p 60). The efforts of

the Carter Administration were undermined and became diffused by more tangible policy interests driven by Brzezinski and a Cold War focus. Competing policies included maintaining support to the Shah, attracting Somalia's Barre following Ethiopia's move toward the Soviets, and a hands-off policy with China in order to facilitate normalization of relations (ibid 60-61). In spite of a global environment that worked against concerted worldwide agreement and constructive behavior, encouraging steps were taken.

Now free of Cold War rivalries, where excesses were rationalized and long term risks were subsumed to short term imperatives, is it not time to see how "new" the "new world order" really is? Is it possible to raise international standards of conduct in order to prevent civilian casualties instead of waiting till horrors have occurred and trying to repair existing wrongs?

#### Policy Options:

Option 1: Do nothing. This is a viable policy option. For all of the reasons described above, constraining availability of infantry weapons to the least developed nations is a very daunting challenge. Progress on this issue would require long, deliberate policy backing and leadership in public and private fora. Progress is contingent on the international community reaching agreement on high moral purpose; a lofty goal that may well be impossible to achieve both diplomatically and politically. Finally, analysis suggests that the Carter efforts at constraining conventional arms trade foundered in part because they did not have consistent Presidential support and focus, and became lost in a bureaucracy that had too many competing

interests (Hartung, Spring '93, pp 60, 62). The potential support available for this issue within the current administration may well not be sufficient to accomplish any real progress.

**Option 2: Do the right thing.** This policy alternative focuses on the fact that we cannot solve the world's problems after they get to the stage of carnage. We owe the peoples of future conflicts all our efforts to convince the nations and the suppliers of the arms that we must collectively find controls. Some efforts exist today; we can put our strength and moral standing behind these efforts and broaden their scope. Existing vehicles include the UN's Inhumane Weapons Convention which has a 1983 protocol prohibiting the indiscriminate use of landmines and use against civilians. While few nations have ratified this protocol, a UN conference will review it later this year or in 1995. This could provide a useful forum for pushing for very significant international changes. Two human rights organizations, Physicians for Human Rights and the Arms Project, are pushing for a total ban on the production, sale and use of landmines (Economist, 27 Nov '93). The U.S. is in a good position to take an aggressive stand here, as we initiated a complete moratorium on exports of landmines in October 1992 (Economist, 24 Apr '93). Few nations in the world are beyond acknowledging that at least the most egregious weapons (landmines, cluster bombs, mortars) must be kept away from regimes that cannot be counted on to restrict their use to purely defensive military operations. The U.S. has tremendous moral credibility and could well accomplish dramatic changes in international norms of commerce in infantry weapons if it aggressively applied it.

**Option 3: Lead by Example.** Acknowledging that the market for

infantry weapons is broad and varied, it is very possible that our most productive contribution to preventing mis-use is to remain engaged in the process of supplying arms. We should, however, restrict our participation to situations where we can contribute to the maturation of the specific military force and its role in a competent government. It has recently been reported that a private Israeli arms supplier will train and equip the Congolese army for \$50 million (Washington Post, 18 Feb '94, A28). This is the business of nations, particularly the stable mature democracies of the world, not arms merchants and soldiers of fortune! Our Coast Guard performs this type of mission with coastal-defense oriented navies around the world. Similarly, U.S. Pacific Command is engaged in joint activities with nations throughout the Pacific which both strengthen bilateral ties and contribute to a constructive, mature role for the various military forces within their political and constitutional structure. We can adopt such a focus with the more modest forces in nations that have been on the margins of our security interests as these nations look to acquire weapons and competent infantry forces. By delivering an ongoing interest and active role in training and integration of weapons we can expect to have both a constructive role in the activities of the military and potentially a position to weigh-in, if we see that events are moving toward a loss of order, and prevent the misdirection of weapons and forces. This approach will only work if we are prepared to make a significant and lasting commitment to remain engaged with the nations to whom we provide arms. We have seen in the past that well armed and highly trained units can be employed on missions we find unacceptable (such as elite U.S. trained units in

Central America that were used in counterinsurgency missions that were focused principally at the civilian population surmised to be supporting the insurgents). We must select the nations that we think that we can contribute to and make the commitment to work with them. We can also set this as the norm, and encourage other mature nations to condition their military sales to such larger nation/military-building programs. The great attraction to this type of program is that the developing nation gets so much more than just the weapons; the vast majority of nations will see such a situation to offer so much more than a simple grey market deal for used Warsaw Pact arms or weapons manufactured in North Korea. If it can be presented and sustained as a term commitment, full participation in the acquisition of weapons by least developed nations offers long term benefits in many dimensions.

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